

Chrysogone's Mother

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An inscribed epigram of the late fourth century B.C., found at Cnidus by Newton and now in the British Museum, offers a dedication to Kore and Demeter¹:

Κούραι καὶ Δάματροι οἶκον καὶ ἄγαλμ' ἀνέθηκεν
Χρυσογόνης μήτηρ, Ἴπποκράτους δὲ ἄλοχος,
Χρυσίνα, ἐννυχίαν ὄψιν ἰδοῦσα ἱεράν·
Ἐρμῆς γὰρ νιν ἔφησε θεαῖς ΤΑΘΝΗ προπολεύειν.

To Kore and Demeter the house² and statue were dedicated by Chrysogone's mother, Hippocrates' wife, Chrysina, who saw a holy vision at night: for Hermes told her to be an attendant to the goddesses ...

So the poem has been understood, from its earliest rendering to the most recent³. The difficulty is in the fourth line. Newton and all who capitalize the meaningless letters despair of emendation and take *Tathne* as a proper name, some location in the vicinity of Cnidus. Or: <δ>ά<φ>νη Bursian, "wearing laurel" (which plant seems inappropriate); τὰ θ<ύ>η Keil, "as to sacrifices" (which seems otiose); <σ>ταθ<μ>η Kaibel, "serve with a ruler" by building the temple (but the present infinitive suggests not an action but a permanent condition, "to be a servant to ..."). This doxography is in Kaibel (1891). Our age is wary of emendation, and the recent editors have been content to cite Kaibel's idea but to print *Tathne*, as a toponym.

Whatever the word, it must fit the larger context. What was the dedicant's situation? Her experience and gesture have been taken to signal "vocation": the gods have called her to the priesthood. That is a familiar and normal feature of the Christian religion⁴, and shared by other mystery cults of the Roman pe-

1 Now Blümel, *I.Knidus* 131 (Kaibel 785; *CEG* II 860; Merkelbach/Stauber, *Steinepigr. gr. Ost.* I 01/01/06); G. Bean/P. M. Fraser, *BSA* 47 (1952) 207 with pl. 41.f, give a photograph of a squeeze.

2 As Blümel notes (invoking *Labraunda* III.2 no. 17), probably some little shrine rather than the temple building; perhaps this was for the statue itself. For the range of the word see M.-C. Hellmann, *Recherches sur le vocabulaire de l'architecture grecque* (Paris 1992) 298–304.

3 C. T. Newton described the find (at a temple, with fragments of statues of Persephone and Demeter and some of the famous curse tablets) in *Travels and Discoveries in the Levant* II (London 1865) 176–177: "this dedication was made in obedience to the god Hermes, who, appearing in a dream, declared to Chrysina that she should be the priestess of these goddesses at a place called Tathne". Merkelbach/Stauber: "Denn Hermes hat ihr Weisung gegeben, den Göttinnen in (dem Ort) Tathne Dienst zu leisten."

4 In some sects a required feature, to be testified to at ordination. From the Book of Common Prayer, Rite of Ordination: "Do you think in your heart, that you are truly called, according to

riod. The famous instance is Lucius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, whom Isis in a dream commanded to be henceforth her servant (*semper tenebis mihi reliqua vitae tuae curricula*, 11.6). But vocation is a logical corollary to such voluntary associations. It figured far less in civic religion, with priests chosen by election or heredity, although purchase was possible in some cities.

A similar inscription from Athens, by its differences, points up the problem of vocation (*IG* II² 4969, mid IV B.C.). An oracle has declared that cult should be instituted for Asclepius and Demon should be the priest:

[ὁ] θεὸς ἔχρησεν τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Ἀθην[αίων ἀναθεῖναι]
[τ]ὴν οἰκίαν τὴν Δήμωνος καὶ τὸν κῆ[ρον τὸν προσόντα]
τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ καὶ αὐτὸν Δήμωνα [ἱερέα εἶναι αὐτοῦ].
ἱερεὺς Δήμων Δημομέλους Παιαν[ιεύς ἀνέθηκε]
καὶ τὴν οἰκίαν καὶ τὸν κῆρον προσ[τάξαντος τοῦ θεοῦ]
καὶ τοῦ δήμου τοῦ Ἀθηναίων δόν[τος ἱερέα εἶναι]
τοῦ Ἀσκληπιῶ κατὰ τὴν μαν[τείαν].

The differences are that here a private cult of volunteers is to become public, the god's command is a public event, and the people vote to appoint the priest; and the god and the Athenians certainly were responding to a request by Demon⁵. By contrast, could Chrysina merely present herself at the temple of Demeter and announce that she was to be a priestess on the strength of a dream? Perhaps instead some lesser attendant such as a *neokoros*. No doubt there was more vocation in paganism than we hear about, given the large number of private shrines, poorly documented. But this is not Chrysina's situation.

Moreover, the logic of Chrysina's action seems murky: she has a dream in which Hermes orders her to be a servant of the goddesses; she responds by dedicating to them a building and a statue. Are these then concrete tokens of her new status? or a substitute for it? We have the priest Chryses' prayer to his god in the *Iliad*, "if ever I roofed a temple pleasing to you" (1.39). But Chrysina is not explicit about her status.

Hence there is reason to be in doubt about Chrysina's vocation. Her way of identifying herself suggests a different motive. She introduces herself as "Chrysogone's mother". This is the first information offered after the gods, her headline. Standing in hallowed space and reading a commemorative inscription, the reader thinks first and chiefly of Chrysogone, and, I suggest, with the impression that the daughter is dead.

So we should reconsider the sense, indeed the grammar, of the last line of the poem. Bean and Fraser (207 n. 19) rightly protested that the verb φημί

the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and according to the Canons of this Church, to the Order and Ministry of Priesthood?" "I think it."

5 For the transformation of the cult of Asclepius at Athens see K. Clinton, "The Epidauria and the Arrival of Asclepius in Athens", in: R. Hägg (ed.), *Ancient Greek Cult Practice from the Epigraphical Evidence* (Stockholm 1994) 17–34.

rarely means to “tell” in the sense of “order,” and that it should take the dative, while the accusative is “very remarkable”. They suggest that the aorist of ἐφήμι was intended, and ascribe ἐφήσε to a mason’s error or some local dialectic variant. φημί sometimes can mean to “tell” someone to do something; but by far its more common use is to “say” that something is so, with accusative and indirect discourse – φημί regularly informs rather than commands⁶. With the accusative it can mean nothing else. We have νιν; take the expression in its normal sense: “For Hermes said that she is an attendant ...” “She”, the referent of νιν and subject of this revelation, will not be Chrysina, who does not need to be told what she is or does; it must be her daughter. This confirms the hint of the second line: Chrysogone is dead.

For why is Hermes the source of the mother’s vision about service to the goddesses? Who better than Hermes Conductor of Souls to be able to inform the living about the fate of the dead? So a poem from Naples requests information about the deceased from Hermes messenger of Persephone: ἄγγελε Φερσεφόνης, Ἐρμῆ, τίνα τόνδε προπονπεῖς | εἰς τὸν ἀμείδιτον Τάρταρον Ἄιδεω; (IG XIV 769; Kaibel 575). If this is right, then Chrysina’s vision was not about this world and her duty in it, but about the afterlife and the fate of her daughter. Hermes gave her what the liturgy calls “comfortable words” about Chrysogone: she is now an attendant of the goddesses. προπολεῦειν – for Persephone had her retinue of favorites. The first so chosen, it was known, had been Hecate: πολλὰ δ’ ἄρ’ ἀμαγαπάησε κόρην Δημήτερος ἀγνήν· ἐκ τοῦ οἱ πρόπολος καὶ ὀπλάων ἔπλετ’ ἄνασσα (Hom. Hymn. Dem. 439–440).

It is unusual for Kore (in line 1) to be named first. The base held a single statue, presumably of Kore⁷. Some might expect the dual for the Twain in line 4 (e.g. IG II² 4588); but that is a pedantry. The problem is not so much grammatical as theological: what we do not expect is for Demeter and Kore to be permanently together in the underworld or anywhere. Read therefore θεᾶι, Kore alone, queen of the dead, invoked first and last in the poem.

This leaves us ΣΤΑΘΝΗ. We should not now seek in these letters some place in the territory of Cnidus, if this was a part of Chrysina’s vision of the realm of the dead. No one has thought that the letters can be Greek, so they must involve a mason’s error and emendation is warranted. What is missing is

6 In epigrams: *Anth. Gr.* 2.1.263; 5.8.5; 5.177.6; 5.186.4; 5.266.2; 6.147.4; 6.149.1; 7.120.2; 7.211.1; 7.545.1; 9.112.2; 9.506.1; 9.629.2; 10.49.1; 10.52.1; 11.139.2; 11.154.4; 11.166.1; 12.165.4; Preger 155.2; 184.2; Plut., *Them.* 1.1; *IosPEF* 195.1; *I. Perg.* VIII.3 129.2; Robert, *Gladiateurs* 298.5; Moretti, *I. agon. gr.* 21.11; *IG UrbRom* IV 1532.15. “Order”: *Anth. Gr.* 12.22.7 φησὶν γὰρ ὄραϊν μόνον, “for he says only look”. ἔφη of information given in a dream vision: Ael. Arist. 48.26 Keil.
7 Bean and Fraser consider a statue of Chrysogone as possible instead. That would be surprising at this early date. In *IG X.2.2* 178 the kin dedicate an image of a dead girl to Aphrodite, “for the Cytherean wanted her to be her temple-sharer”; but this was half a millenium later than Chrysina’s dedication.

some specification of the goddess; and the letters have the look of the right sort of adjective. We might then consider emending to θεᾶι σ<εμ>νήι, an appropriate description of a divinity whom one serves. In Roman Alexandria we find, invoking the rulers of the underworld, σεμνή τε Φερσεφασσα, Δήμητρος κόρη (Bernard, *I. métr. Eg.* 43.6); on Syros, εἰερεία τε κατασταθεῖσα τῶν οὐρανίων θεῶν Δήμητρος καὶ Κόρης τῶν σεμνοτάτων (IG XII.5 655). If this alteration is granted, then: “For Hermes said that she is an attendant to the <dread?> goddess.” But leave the word as a speculation; it does not affect our understanding of the whole.

The theme then is not vocation but thanksgiving: the poem articulates a story where a thousand other dedications summarize with the word χαριστήριον. The child Chrysogone is dead. In her grief, her mother, for whom the girl was named⁸, has had a dream. Hermes gave her not a command but a comforting revelation. What more longed-for vision to a bereaved parent? The lamented girl is in fact now a favorite of the gods. It is a timeless hope. So begins a poem for a girl who (one assumes) drowned in the Nile (II A.D.)⁹:

οὐκέτι σοι μέλλω θύειν, θύγα[τερ, μετ]ὰ κλ[α]υθμοῦ,
ἔξ οὗ δὴ ἔγνων, ὡς θεὸς ἐξεγένου.
λοιβαῖς εὐφημεῖτε καὶ εὐχολαῖς Ἰσιδώραν,
ἢ νύμφη Νυμφῶν ἀρπαγίμη γέγονεν.
χαῖρε, τέκος· Νύμφη ὄνομ’ ἐστὶ σοι (κτλ.)⁹

No longer will I sacrifice to you with lamentations, daughter, now that I have learned that you turned into a god. With libations and prayers bless Isidora, who, a girl (nymph), has become a prize of the Nymphs. Hail, child, we name you Nympe ...

(He does not say how he learned this.) Some such comfort did the dead Creusa, speaking for herself, hint to Aeneas (*Aen.* 2.788): “The great Mother of the Gods keeps me on these shores.” Her naming the divinity with such precision and confidence has led many readers to deduce that in death Creusa was made an honored servant of the goddess¹⁰. A Christian consolation of long standing would make a special angel of a deceased child. Ben Jonson on his daughter (1593)¹¹:

8 For a mother choosing the name of her daughter we have the word of Demeter herself, *Hymn. Hom. Dem.* 122.

9 Bernard, *I. métr. Eg.* 87; cf. L. Kákosy, *JEA* 68 (1982) 295.

10 Conington (1876), “evidently ... one of her attendants ... a half-deified state”; A. G. Austin (1964) 284, “presumably, Cybele’s priestess” (but the dead cannot be priests).

11 *Epigr.* 22: C. H. Herford/P. and E. Simpson, *Ben Jonson* VIII (Oxford 1947) 33–34. Commentary: Ann Lainger, *SPh* 86 (1989) 219–234.

Here lyes to each her parents ruth,
MARY, the daughter of their youth:
Yet, all heavens gifts, being heavens due,
It makes the father, lesse, to rue.
At sixe moneths end, shee parted hence
With safetie of her innocence;
Whose soule heavens Queene, (whose name shee beares)
In comfort of her mothers teares,
Hath plac'd amongst her virgin-traine ...

The subject of Chrysina's poem throughout, its occasion, is Chrysogone. Hermes has revealed that now she is a chosen attendant of Kore, and to that daughter and her mother Chrysina makes her thank-offering. The circle of the poem is closed, and the logic of Chrysina's gesture complete: she honors Kore first as is fitting, but not alone, for she adds Demeter – whose loss, grief, consolation, and honor Chrysina understands. She is Chrysogone's mother.

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